



Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Strategic Plan (2003 – 2008)

Revised March 2004

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Introduction

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is an action-oriented agency that works with other Federal agencies, Congress, the States, agricultural interests, and the general public to carry out its mission:

To protect the health and value of American agriculture and natural resources.

APHIS uses its umbrella of protection, as depicted in Figure 1, to assure its customers and stakeholders that it is on guard against the introduction or reemergence of animal and plant pests and diseases that could limit production and damage export markets. At the same time, APHIS also monitors and responds to potential acts of agricultural bioterrorism, invasive species, diseases of wildlife and livestock, and conflicts between humans and wildlife.

APHIS' Mission:

To protect the health and value of American agriculture and natural resources

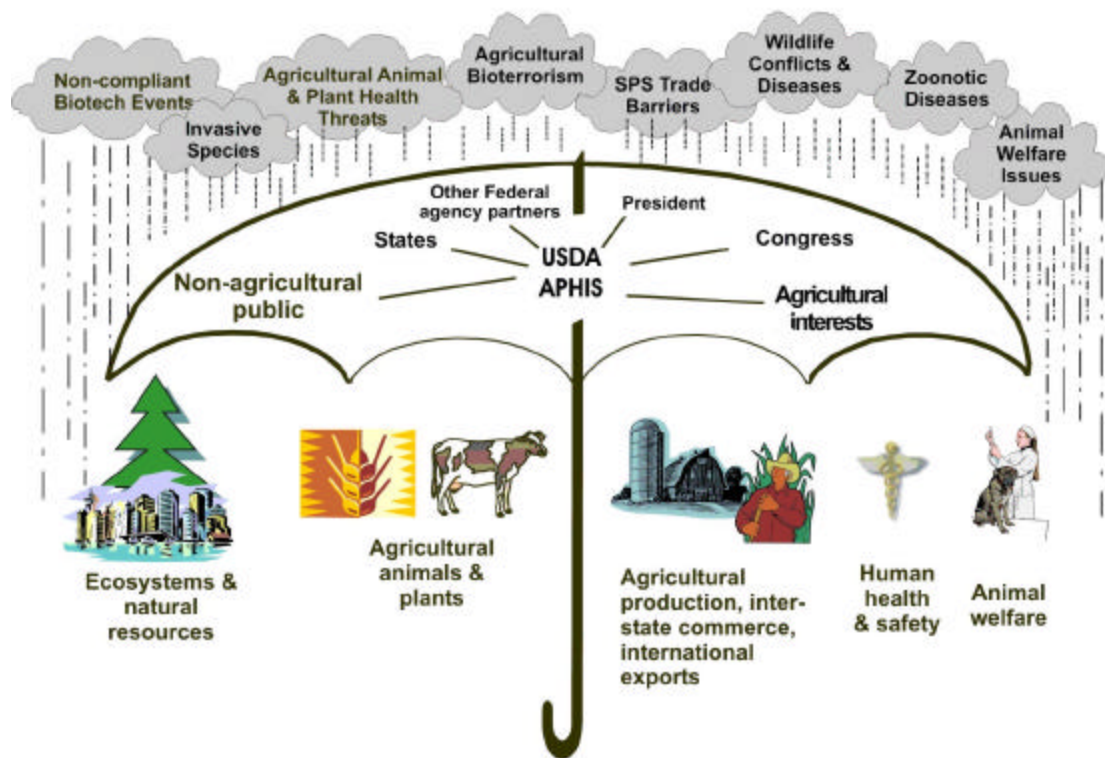


Figure 1

APHIS also addresses sanitary and phytosanitary trade barriers and certain issues related to the humane treatment of animals. Finally, APHIS ensures that biotechnology-derived agricultural products are safe for release into the environment. At the end of March 2004, APHIS employed roughly 7000 people with a wide range of scientific, technical, and administrative skills working in all 50 states, several territories and some 25 countries around the world. The workforce is organized into six operational program units, three management support units and the Office of Civil Rights (see figure 2). APHIS will spend over \$1.14 billion in fiscal year 2004 to carry out its mission. The bulk of the agency's funding comes from Congressional appropriations. APHIS also receives funding through other sources, including user fees, cooperative agreements, and international trust fund arrangements.

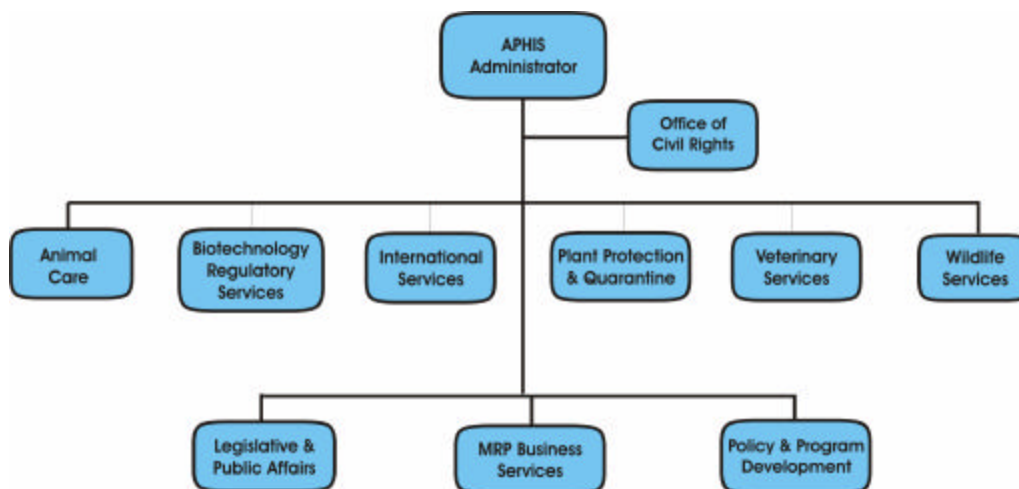


Figure 2

All APHIS mission activities are carried out under the provisions of specific Federal laws. Several recent acts of Congress, including the Plant Protection Act (2000), the Animal Health Protection Act (2002), and the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness Act (2002), have expanded the scope of APHIS' mission and provided additional protective responsibilities.

Protection System

A key to APHIS' overall success has been the way each operational unit has successfully met the expectations of its main agricultural stakeholders. To continue to meet these expectations, program resources will need to be allocated and shared to maximize the potential for the success of APHIS' overall protection system. This system is a collection of **interdependent objectives** forming a **wheel of protection** against a variety of threats (see Figure 3).

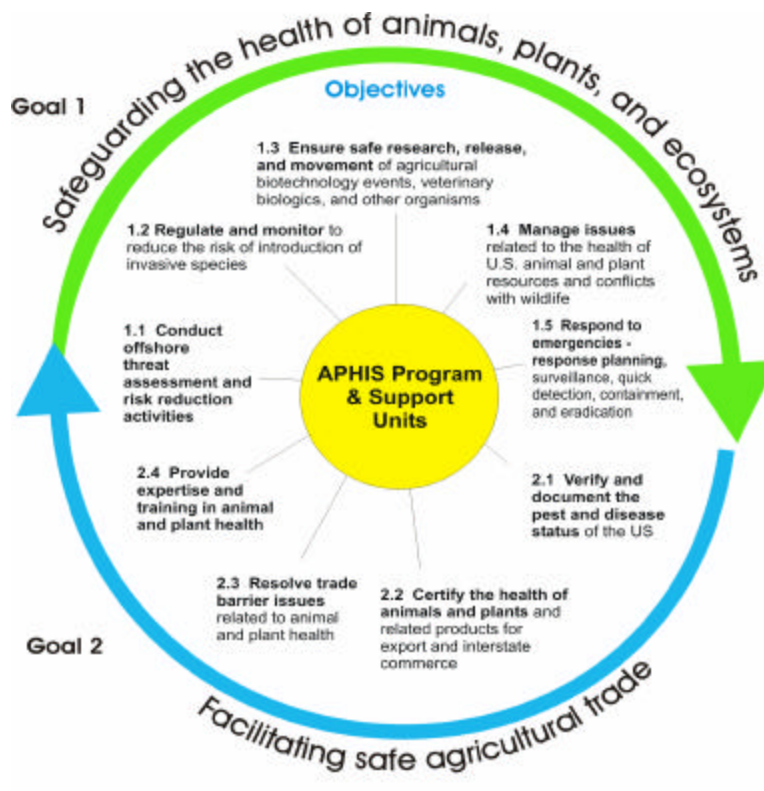


Figure 3

The system is based on a strategic premise that *safeguarding the health of animals, plants, and ecosystems makes possible safe agricultural trade and reduces losses to agricultural and natural resources*. One weak spoke can threaten our capability to protect the health and value of American agriculture and natural resources.

APHIS has built its strategic plan around this system of interdependent objectives. APHIS will carry out its programs to achieve two main mission-oriented goals and a management goal over the next five years:

- Goal 1. Safeguard the health of animals, plants, and ecosystems in the United States
- Goal 2. Facilitate safe agricultural trade
- Goal 3. Ensure the effective and efficient management of programs to achieve APHIS' mission

The goals and strategies of APHIS' current strategic plan are not significantly different from previous plans. What is new, however, is that APHIS is being ***more specific about approaching its protection activities as a system of interdependent strategies***.

New Challenges

Although APHIS' human and financial resources and legal authorities are considerable, the Agency faces several significant challenges to maintain its umbrella of protection and achieve its mission.

Globalization, free trade agreements, and transportation technologies have increased the risk of introduction of exotic invasive species. A key APHIS protection strategy has been to regulate and inspect imports of agricultural products most likely to be carrying exotic animal and plant pests and diseases. Under the recent free trade agreements, there has been a substantial increase in the numbers of requests for imports into this country. This has placed an added burden on APHIS to continue to ensure scientific rigor in its assessment of potential health threats, while at the same time trying not to impede trade. At the same time that APHIS is developing regulations for imports, many other agricultural stakeholders ask APHIS to ensure that U.S. agricultural exports are unimpeded by the sanitary or phytosanitary (SPS) regulations of trading partners. A key challenge for APHIS is to serve as a leader in international arenas where SPS standards are being developed and applied, and where priorities are set for capacity building efforts.

The President has issued a series of directives which outline policies which help implement the Homeland Security Act of 2002. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, and APHIS in particular, is being called upon to play a key role in helping to protect the agriculture and food system from terrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies. APHIS will play a leadership role by building upon and expanding current monitoring and surveillance programs, including national and international information, to support early detection and awareness of threats to animal and plant resources, including wildlife disease threats.

APHIS will coordinate with DHS, HHS, and EPA to achieve these homeland security goals. Challenges include such initiatives as creating a new biological threat awareness capacity and developing mitigation strategies for vulnerabilities at critical production and processing nodes.

APHIS also faces challenges with respect to integrating and protecting its science and technology infrastructure. First, APHIS will play a key role in integrating current laboratory resources into a nationwide laboratory network for veterinary and plant health, utilizing federal and states resources and standardizing diagnostic protocols and procedures. Secondly, APHIS will work in concert with HHS/CDC and DOJ to develop and implement processes and procedures to monitor and track the possession and use of select agents and toxins.

In all of these efforts, and others related to emergency preparedness and response, APHIS is challenged to communicate and coordinate efforts throughout the security community in such a way that its own employees, and its partners, clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and have at their disposal the resources they need to quickly and effectively respond to emergencies.

Due to last year's move of APHIS' port-of-entry inspectors to the Department of Homeland Security, APHIS continues to coordinate and communicate plans and policies with DHS, and to resolve challenges related to program budgeting and human capital planning.

While APHIS must make adjustments to ensure it continues to respond effectively to the needs of traditional agricultural constituencies, the Nation expects the Agency's scientific, technical, and regulatory expertise and authorities to address many other important protection issues. APHIS will also be challenged to attract and retain the scientific and technical expertise needed to meet these challenges.

APHIS must meet the challenge to be as responsive to the needs of its employees as it is to the needs of external stakeholder groups. After all, it is the agency's mission-focused employees who are responsible for the success of the agency. APHIS has added a sixth mission priority to its strategic plan as one way to demonstrate its commitment to meeting this challenge. The priority is to "Value and invest in employees" so that they can have the skills, experiences, and resources they need to accomplish all of the other mission priorities.

Strategic Mission Priorities

As part of its new strategic direction, APHIS intends to strengthen key components of its protection system by focusing, in order of priority, on the following key objectives and strategies:

1. Ensuring the safe research, release, and movement of agricultural biotechnology

In order for U.S. agriculture to take advantage of the tremendous potential of this technology, APHIS must ensure that national and international stakeholders and the global public have full confidence in its safety. To ensure confidence, we regulate both plant and animal biotechnology with appropriate rigor based on a combination of risk and scientific familiarity. This involves updating Agency regulations and oversight procedures to rigorously address advances in the technology and the risks posed by those advances and allowing lighter regulation and oversight when our experience and familiarity with the safety of certain products or classes of products indicates.

Internally, APHIS will continue to strengthen its scientific risk analysis capability, ensuring that the best science is available to support regulatory development and decision making. We will continue to encourage compliance with our regulations backing that encouragement with strong enforcement through enhanced inspection and auditing functions. We will develop regulations and oversight procedures, build scientific capacity and enforcement capability openly and transparently as a way to engage and involve the public and interested stakeholders in these processes. We will expand its international presence, building global regulatory capacity and ensuring the continued development of consistent international standards.

2. Strengthening emergency and homeland security preparedness and response

With the heightened concerns about potential bioterrorism and related threats to our national security, the APHIS emergency management system will be expanded to include the full range of potential threats. The overall system of preparedness and response focuses on protecting animal and plant health from both intentional and accidental introductions of pests and diseases and includes protection for the critical animal and plant health infrastructure that supports American agriculture and our food supply.

The Agency is committed to working with DHS and other partners on vulnerability assessments and mitigation strategies and to working with the Department of Health and Human Services to enforce the Agricultural Bioterrorism Act. There are two components of the emergency and homeland security preparedness and response system:

A. Nationally-Coordinated Pest and Disease Surveillance and Detection Systems

APHIS will further involve Federal, State, academic, and industry resources in strengthening its comprehensive, coordinated and integrated surveillance and detection system. We will broaden our diagnostic capability by supporting the National Animal Health Laboratory Network and the National Plant Diagnostic Network. We will improve our ability to track livestock movement through a national system of livestock identification and tagging.

B. Animal and Plant Health Emergency Response Systems

APHIS will ensure that resources are strengthened, combined (Federal, State, Local, and Industry) and coordinated to respond to emergencies effectively and efficiently. We will complete the transition to the National Incident Management and Incident Command Systems.

3. Resolving trade barrier issues related to sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) issues

APHIS already puts a heavy emphasis on resolving SPS issues, but the agency must make an even greater push to find ways to help resolve these issues, which have been identified as one of USDA's highest program priorities for enhancing agricultural exports. APHIS will increase use of several tactics to achieve this priority:

A. Resolve issues through relationship building

When an issue arises overseas regarding a specific shipment, our APHIS attaches are on the spot to resolve those specific issues. The attachés have been effective because they work to build relationships with their foreign counterparts and are able to navigate the complex systems, relationships, and cultures that exist in foreign countries.

B. Developing coalitions for U.S. policies and positions

Resolving trade disputes can often be accomplished at international standard-setting bodies such as the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), and CODEX. To ensure these bodies adopt U.S. positions on agricultural trade issues, APHIS must build coalitions that support scientific standards upon which sanitary and phytosanitary issues can be more easily resolved.

4. Reducing domestic threats through increased offshore threat assessment and risk-reduction activities

The globalization of agriculture makes it necessary for APHIS to develop and implement programs that identify health threats outside our borders and reduce those threats at the source. The APHIS Management Team identified three offshore activities to emphasize in coming years:

- A. Build an international plant and animal pest, disease, and pathway information system that will feed into the domestic surveillance and detection system.
- B. Eradicate specific exotic pests and diseases that continue to be reintroduced in the United States causing emergency situations or that otherwise pose a clear, immediate danger of being introduced.
- C. Provide training and technology transfer for developing countries to build their animal and plant health infrastructures and thus reduce the likelihood of undetected threat pathways into the United States.

5. Managing issues related to the health of U.S. animal and plant resources and conflicts with wildlife

Although APHIS will continue to manage a wide variety of domestic programs to protect the interests of traditional agricultural interests, the agency will focus on programs to address:

- A. Wildlife issues: We will expand wildlife disease and invasive species research programs. APHIS and its stakeholders have become aware of the need to pay more attention to wildlife diseases—particularly those that are transmissible to humans and domestic livestock—and invasive species that impact ecosystems. APHIS' National Wildlife Research Center will continue to expand its research into these areas. This research has important implications for APHIS emergency preparedness initiatives. APHIS will continue to partner with the Federal Aviation Administration to work with managers of the country's airports to minimize the risks wildlife pose to the safety of the public and the aviation industry.
- B. Education and outreach: Emphasize outreach and education as a strategy to assure the humane welfare and treatment of animals.
- C. Certification, Auditing and Accreditation approaches: Develop innovative and expanded uses of certification, auditing, and accreditation approaches. Inspection and compliance monitoring are functions that facilitate international and interstate trade and safeguard animal and plant health. With limited resources and the loss of APHIS' port of entry inspection workforce, the Agency will need to use its authorities and regulatory capacity to partner with other federal agencies, industry, states, trading partners, and international organizations to ensure that safeguards are adequately enforced.

6. Value and invest in APHIS employees

None of these strategic priorities would be possible without the Agency's dedicated, knowledgeable, skilled and diverse workforce. APHIS is committed to:

- A. Effective workforce planning to ensure that the right numbers and kinds of employees continue to be in place to do the job
- B. Creating a work environment in which employees are actively involved and have what they need to do their jobs including:
 - 1) Effective management and leadership
 - 2) Clearly communicated information about expectations, direction and priorities
 - 3) Developmental opportunities to gain needed skills and knowledge
 - 4) Feedback on work done that includes rewards and recognition as appropriate
 - 5) Human Resource policies that recognize the Agency's critical responsibilities and employees' personal needs

Management Priorities

In addition to the mission priorities, APHIS will implement the following management initiatives to ensure the effective and efficient management of agency programs:

- Re-engineer the regulatory approach and process with special emphasis on how risk analysis is used in APHIS.
- Develop collaborative budget and program initiatives across APHIS programs.
- Improve sharing of information across the Agency to adapt and expand use of field/mission bases technology (not information technology).
- Implement the President's Management Agenda
 - Improve human capital management. Develop workforce management initiatives to provide employees with the skills and tools to carry out the mission.
 - Expand electronic government
 - Improve financial management
 - Integrate performance and cost/benefit information into budgeting
 - Establish strategic sourcing

APHIS' Commitment

Throughout all of APHIS' planning for the future, one thing remains clear. The mandate for the future of APHIS is the same as the past. It is protection. It is safeguarding America's borders. It is ensuring that the health of America's agriculture is not threatened. Although the processes by which the agency protects America's healthy and diverse food supply are increasingly challenged, APHIS is committed to taking the lead in building and maintaining a world-class protection system that safeguards the health of animals, plants, and ecosystems in the United States and fosters safe agricultural trade worldwide.